

# Struggle for the Marianas

By BERNARD D. COLE

## Summary

In June 1944 the Armed Forces executed Operation Forager—the capture of the Marianas (namely, the islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam)—and destroyed Japanese airpower in the Battle of the Philippine Sea. The Marianas were secured by both marines and soldiers backed by naval gunfire and close air support from all services. American success in the battle on and around these islands doomed the fortunes of the Japanese empire by severing its sea lines of communication over which the resources of Southeast Asia transited and by establishing B-29 bases within striking distance of Japan's home islands. This victory was executed by Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Army Air Force units who set the pattern for the further development of joint operations.

*USS Lexington launching F-6F Hellcat with USS North Carolina, USS Enterprise, and other ships in the distance.*

U.S. Navy



Last year witnessed a wide range of ceremonies to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Allied landings at Normandy, and

rightly so: June 6<sup>th</sup> has great significance in the history of this century and defined America's post-war role. But little attention was paid on this anniversary to the fact that fifty years earlier on the same date and half a world away, U.S. task groups had made their way toward an objective in the western Pacific almost as important to the Nation as Normandy.

Operation Forager, the assault on the Marianas, was very similar in two ways to Operation Neptune, the assault landings on the Normandy coast. Both had been two years in the making and were starting points for even greater efforts. Just as Neptune opened the campaign in northwest Europe, so the campaign to secure Saipan, Tinian, and Guam set the stage for a strategic bombing campaign against Japan's home islands and further amphibious operations in the western Pacific. Both operations also had been plagued by issues of operational concept, available resources, and



| <b>Report Documentation Page</b>  |                                    |   | <i>Form Approved<br/>OMB No. 0704-0188</i>                |                                 |
|---|------------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------|
| <p>Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.</p> |                                    |   |   |                                 |
| 1. REPORT DATE<br><b>1995</b>   | 2. REPORT TYPE                     | 3. DATES COVERED<br><b>00-00-1995 to 00-00-1995</b> |   |                                 |
| 4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE<br><b>Struggle for the Marianas</b>   |                                    | 5a. CONTRACT NUMBER                                 |   |                                 |
|   |                                    | 5b. GRANT NUMBER                                    |   |                                 |
|   |                                    | 5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER                          |   |                                 |
| 6. AUTHOR(S)  |                                    | 5d. PROJECT NUMBER                                  |   |                                 |
|   |                                    | 5e. TASK NUMBER                                     |   |                                 |
|   |                                    | 5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER                                |   |                                 |
| 7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)<br><b>National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319</b>  |                                    | 8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER            |   |                                 |
| 9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)   |                                    | 10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)                    |   |                                 |
|   |                                    | 11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)              |   |                                 |
| 12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT<br><b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>   |                                    |   |   |                                 |
| 13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES   |                                    |   |   |                                 |
| 14. ABSTRACT  |                                    |   |   |                                 |
| 15. SUBJECT TERMS   |                                    |   |   |                                 |
| 16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:   |                                    |   | 17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT<br><b>Same as Report (SAR)</b> | 18. NUMBER OF PAGES<br><b>8</b> |
| a. REPORT<br><b>unclassified</b>  | b. ABSTRACT<br><b>unclassified</b> | c. THIS PAGE<br><b>unclassified</b>                 | 19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON                           |                                 |

the war in the Pacific represented a failure to adopt joint warfare at the strategic and theater level

organization; but Forager, in contrast to Neptune, raises a relevant issue given the current stress on joint warfighting. The war in the Pacific represented a failure to adopt joint warfare at the strategic and theater level. At the operational and tactical levels, however, the cooperative efforts of the Army, Navy-Marine team, and Army Air Force yielded results which epitomize the benefit of joint warfare.

The concept of jointness suggests an equality of service effort and a common plan, but our endeavor in the Pacific was marked by the lack of these joint attributes. Interservice strife assured that the principle of unity of command was set aside, and for the Army and Navy in their separate areas of responsibility offensive operations guaranteed the primacy of separate efforts, either by evading joint warfare or ensuring that it was conducted on their own terms. Moreover, even at the time of Forager the high command was deeply divided over an essential aspect of the war, namely, whether Japan would be blockaded and bombarded or invaded, and correlatively, which senior officer—and hence which service—would command as the war was carried to Japan's shores. Along the way the claims of the Central and Southwest Pacific offensives were never defined.

The resources available in the Pacific during 1944 and 1945 allowed the United States to prosecute both offensives simultaneously. This aspect of the conduct of operations is significant: American success in Forager and fleet action provoked by landings on Saipan were results of overwhelming force. As in Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm, supremacy in numbers, quality, and technique over the enemy provided victory at relatively low cost.

#### American *Blitzkrieg*

Forager was a brainchild of Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet, and Chief of Naval Operations. King was the principal architect of the strategic plan that emerged after the Quadrant conference

held at Quebec in August 1943: the Pacific Fleet under Admiral Chester W. Nimitz would strike Japan's empire through the Central Pacific, while the Southwest Pacific Command under General Douglas A. MacArthur continued its Army-orientated campaign along the northern coast of New Guinea. This basic plan, which involved building airfields in the Marianas for the strategic bombing of Japan, was reaffirmed at the Sextant conference at Cairo in November–December 1943. But in the wake of the Gilberts campaign, and as a result of the shock received at Tarawa, Nimitz in January 1944 backed MacArthur's claim for primacy for a campaign across the Pacific to the Philippines.

This unusual accord between the two Pacific commands was promptly rejected by an angry King. He understood that the Carolines and the Marianas had to be taken to eliminate the Japanese threat to the flank of an offensive from the Southwest Pacific and that there could be no advance to the Philippines while Japanese power in the Central Pacific archipelagos remained unreduced. Moreover, King realized that possession of the southern Marianas would place a thumb on Japan's windpipe and give the Navy's Central Pacific drive priority over MacArthur's campaign in the Southwest Pacific. For sound strategic and institutional reasons, King was not prepared to agree to a Southwest Pacific priority that effectively subordinated the Navy to MacArthur's command, especially just when the Navy had come into possession of the means to dominate in the Pacific: American shipyards had by January 1944 produced a carrier force of unprecedented strength and capability. For the first 21 months of the Pacific war American carrier operations had been both small in number and short in duration, but by January 1944 the Pacific Fleet possessed the means of overwhelming not just a single enemy base or number of bases within a single island group, but a number of groups of bases simultaneously. The depth of American power allowed a campaign across a broad strategic front—to launch masses of naval forces against the enemy, a series of attacks that may be thought of as *blitzkrieg* against the Japanese *Maginot Line* of fortified islands.

At Guadalcanal in 1942, the Navy had been barely able to land and support marines and Army troops on the beach. By

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June 1944—less than two years after Guadalcanal—the fleet had achieved overwhelming strength in numbers and power. In 1943 alone, the United States commissioned enough warship tonnage to almost equal the Japanese navy at its strongest. Massive

carrier and amphibious forces were supported by large numbers of battleships and cruisers; destroyers provided efficient anti-submarine defense; our submarines were isolating

Japan and sinking many crucial fleet units, especially oilers and destroyers (by mid-1944 the enemy was unable to defend their surface forces against our submarines).

Our Navy in 1944 was a modern wartime force, while Japanese naval forces were products of the 1930s. American carriers were bigger, more durable, and able to operate for longer periods of time than those of the enemy. American naval aviation produced more and better trained pilots. The Japanese were unable to modernize and increase their navy to maintain even their 1941 status in relative terms; nor were they able to train the pilots needed to replace veteran flyers of the 1930s. The fleet would go to the Marianas, as the suitably chastened Nimitz, who could no more than any other naval officer of his day stand up to King, quickly agreed.

The war in the Central Pacific was marked by successes in the Gilberts (Operation Galvanic, November 1943) and the Marshalls (Operations Flintlock and Catchpole, January–February 1944), both won by the Fifth Fleet under Vice Admiral Raymond Spruance. The campaign was complex, however, with anti-shipping operations by submarines and vast Army Air Force bombing strikes.

By late spring 1944, submarines had gone a fair way toward sweeping Japanese shipping from the high seas. They later wreaked similar havoc on coastal trade, even penetrating Japanese harbors. The effectiveness of the submarine effort is supported by the fact that whereas between March and October 1943 the Japanese lost 354 ships (over one million tons) to all causes and in all theaters, between November 1943 and May 1944 they lost 642 ships (over two million tons).

Moreover, the attacks of American medium and heavy bombers flying from islands taken by marines and Army troops—

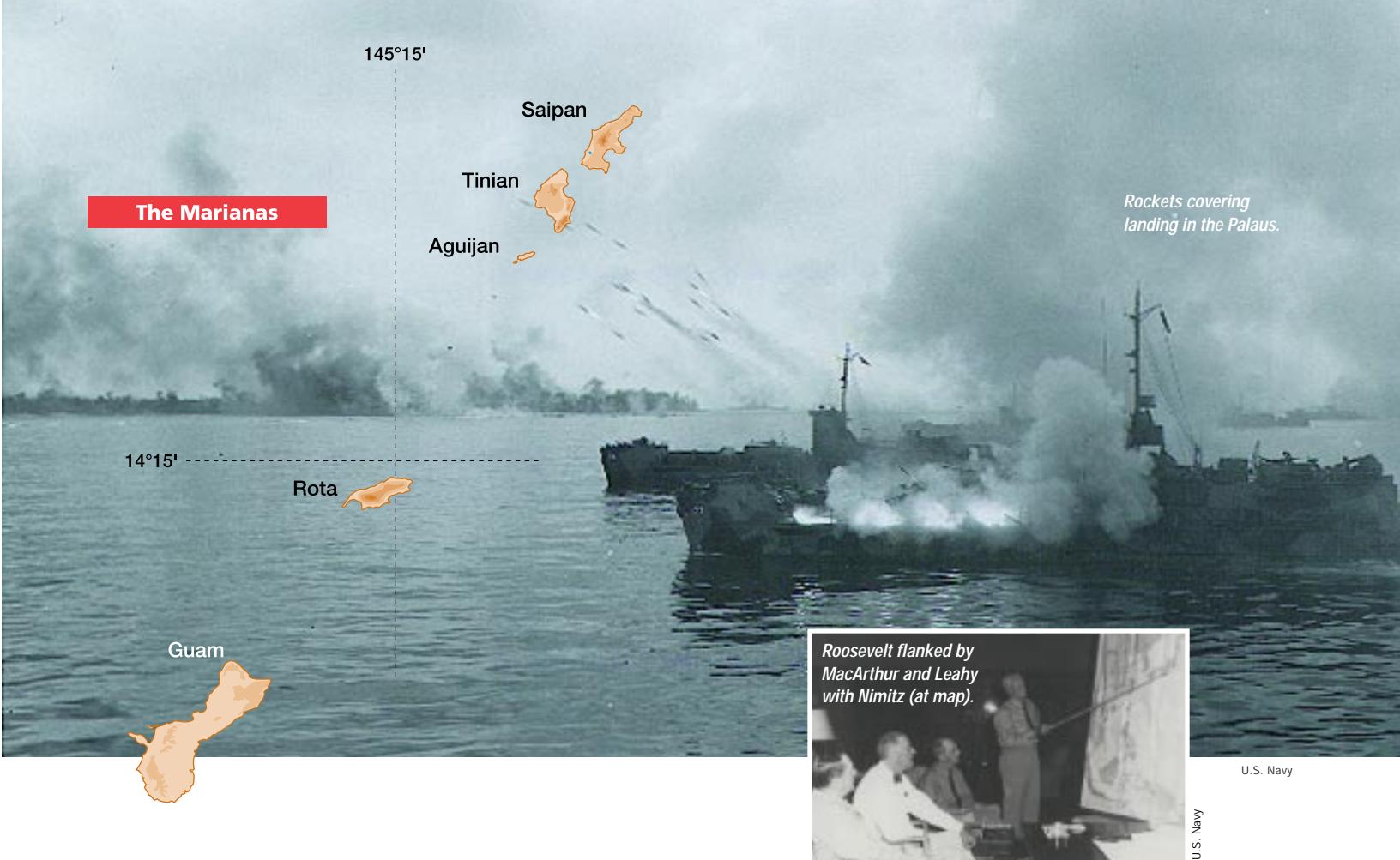
regular, Reserve, and National Guard—were potent. The Battle of the Bismarck Sea in March 1943 was the first occasion when shore-based Army bombers made a strategically significant contribution to the war in the Pacific, but thereafter it was a major factor. Losses inflicted by submarines and bombers illustrated the effectiveness of interservice cooperation and jeopardized the enemy's plan to fight on the Saipan-Palaus-western New Guinea defense line.

#### Theory into Application

The Central Pacific campaign was made possible by tactics and equipment conceived during the 1920s and 1930s, when the Marine Corps developed amphibious warfare doctrine and the Army Air Corps refined the principles of bombing and air interdiction. The Marines were searching for a role after World War I; seizing advanced bases would support War Plan Orange, the central Navy war plan of the day. Commandant John A. Lejeune and other Marine leaders correctly saw this mission, which would guarantee a major role in the war against Japan as the way to ensure the Corps' existence. Hence, in the 1920s the Marines defined amphibious assault in the context of ongoing defense planning and began seeking ways to carry it out. By the late 1930s they had made extensive progress in doctrine and equipment, testing them in exercises in the Atlantic and Caribbean. Most significantly, attention had been directed to the islands of the Central Pacific as the most likely area for amphibious warfare.

The Air Force worked hard at this time to refine the theories of visionaries like Douhet and Mitchell. Many Army Air Force leaders of the war, including Kenney, Hansell, Whitehead, and LeMay, had cut their teeth in those years in both the classroom and the air, developing tactics and systems to translate theory into application. The doctrine and performance of marines and airmen matured in Pacific campaigns as the hesitancy and missteps of Guadalcanal, New Guinea, and Tarawa were heeded. Coordinated amphibious assault and air warfare became irrepressible.

Nimitz ordered the Fifth Fleet to carry out the amphibious assault on the Marianas in June 1944. Spruance, now a four-star, still



### The Marianas

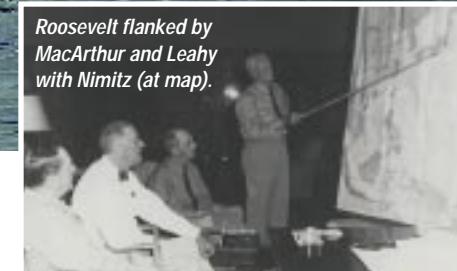
(Distances from Saipan shown in nautical miles)

|             |       |
|-------------|-------|
| Guadalcanal | 1,720 |
| Guam        | 101   |
| Kwajalein   | 1,355 |
| Manila      | 1,500 |
| Midway      | 2,210 |
| Palau       | 840   |
| Rabaul      | 1,230 |
| Tarawa      | 1,810 |
| Tinian      | 3     |
| Yokohama    | 1,285 |

Source: Carl W. Hoffman, *Saipan: The Beginning of the End* (Washington: Historical Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1950).

commanded. The fleet's aircraft carriers, Task Force 58, were led by Vice Admiral Marc Mitscher and its amphibious forces by Vice Admiral R.K. Turner. If challenged by the Japanese, Spruance would engage in what the Americans hoped would be the decisive Central Pacific fleet battle so often wargamed at the Naval War College in the 1920s and 1930s. The plan was ambitious: the late Japanese fleet commander, Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, had tried to follow the same scheme at Midway in 1942 by having amphibious forces capture the island while he destroyed the U.S. fleet when it deployed in defense of the island. Yamamoto had failed (much as Halsey would fail in this difficult dual mission in October 1944 at Leyte Gulf), his plan being too complex and his intentions being compromised by our ability to read the Japanese codes.

Hence, Spruance had a difficult task. And while he hoped that Operation Forager would result in a double stroke against the enemy—capture of the islands and destruction of the Japanese fleet—his priorities were firmly established on the former. Loss of the Marianas would completely expose enemy



Roosevelt flanked by MacArthur and Leahy with Nimitz (at map).

U.S. Navy

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lines of supply to Southeast Asia. These islands—Saipan, Tinian, and Guam—lay 1,200 miles southeast of Japan and stretched along a northeast-southwest axis for 425 miles. They had a significant Japanese civilian population and were heavily garrisoned. Saipan was seventy square miles in area, with geography more like that of New Guinea than the small coral and sand atolls of the Gilberts and Marshalls. While Tinian offered the best terrain for the large bomber airfields that were the chief reason for the islands' capture, Saipan had to be secured first since it allowed Japanese artillery to cover Tinian; hence, its capture would allow American artillery to support the assault on that island. Guam was less valuable in military terms than either Saipan or Tinian, but as capital of the Marianas and an American territory before the war, it was politically important and would be the object of a separate amphibious task force.

Opposing Spruance was a still formidable enemy but one whose strategic position and purpose was marked by weakness and over-commitment. As the Japanese situation

worsened in 1943, plans were recast and ambitions checked by the inauguration of the New Operational Policy on September 1943. By writing off eastern New Guinea and the Solomons the Japanese sought to concentrate future attention on the defense of the Kuriles, Bonins, Marianas, Carolines, and East Indies, a line extending through Saipan, Truk, and central New Guinea that enclosed the positions on which the Japanese intended to meet further offensives. The de-

**the United States deployed a massive joint force with both a coherent plan and an integrated strategy**

feats of early 1944, however, forced the Japanese high command to further limit its defensive liabilities to western New Guinea. This yielded Plan Z, an operation plan with which Admiral Koga Mineichi, Commander in Chief Combined Fleet, proposed to give battle. An American move against western New Guinea would be countered by Japanese carrier forces supported by land-based aircraft, but a move against the Marianas would be opposed by shore-based aircraft supported by the carriers. With this attempt at joint warfare, Koga hoped to minimize the weaknesses of both his land-based and carrier air forces and to offer battle on equal terms to a superior enemy carrier force.

Plan Z was probably the best plan available to the Japanese in early 1944 but was flawed on three counts. First, it called for a coordinated joint employment of land-based and carrier air power that had proven far beyond Japanese capability to date. Second, success would depend on timing and concentration, specifically in terms of feeding land-based airpower into the battle; but by definition a defensive battle could not be fought with the assurance or either or both. Third, by June 1944 the basic Japanese strategic intention depended on a carrier force no longer capable of registering even the partial successes that had come its way in the second half of 1942. Its pilots were inexperienced and inadequately trained, its aircraft were no longer a match for American planes, and its carrier air groups were smaller and weaker than their enemy counterparts.

Koga died in a plane crash on March 31, 1944. His successor, Toyoda Soemu, revised Plan Z, issuing it as A-Go Plan on May 3. Toyoda intended to concentrate all his strength against the U.S. fleet. He transferred

control of the battleships to his carrier commander, Vice Admiral Ozawa Jisaburo, and appointed him Mobile Fleet Commander, urged surprise attack, and wanted to lure the American fleet into a position where it could be attacked both by carrier- and land-based aircraft—preferably in the American Southwest Pacific theater, near the Japanese sources of fuel in the East Indies. This plan was further flawed by depending on the enemy's cooperation.

#### Japan's Fatal Predicament

In June 1944 the United States deployed a massive joint force with both a coherent plan and an integrated strategy against a weakened Japanese defense operating with an inexecutable plan and confused strategy. The individual campaigns in the Southwest and Central Pacific had placed our forces in position for a major advance against the Japanese: MacArthur was pushing towards the Philippines while the Marianas were the logical next step for Nimitz.

Carrier planes first bombed the Marianas on February 23, 1944, destroying 168 Japanese aircraft at a cost of just five U.S. planes. Further carrier strikes were conducted during the month preceding the invasion to soften up the islands, while Army Air Force B-24s bombed Guam five times in late April through June. These Army and Navy air attacks were only marginally effective against Saipan's beach defenses but did neutralize Japan's land-based airpower. Although the 32,000 Japanese on Saipan were twice the American estimate, submarine and air interdiction had prevented the arrival of most of the heavy weapons and supplies planned for the island's defense.

MacArthur's victories in western New Guinea in April and May 1944 did not immediately elicit a major challenge from the Japanese navy since the enemy was waiting for the U.S. fleet to move closer to the Southwest Pacific area. And when a significant move was made toward New Guinea in early June, it was quickly diverted toward the Marianas. Once Toyoda was certain that Spruance was headed for those islands, he ordered Ozawa to attack in the Marianas area and annihilate the invasion force, to activate Operation A-Go for decisive battle.

Toyoda's rudder swing from the American Southwest to Central Pacific theaters accented Japan's fatal predicament. The dual campaigns by MacArthur and Nimitz left the Imperial Fleet between a rock and a hard place: it had to resist both American thrusts at the same time and hence could successfully counter neither. Ozawa got underway from his fleet anchorage at Tawi Tawi in the southern Philippines on June 13, hoping to destroy Spruance with long range attacks by land-based airpower from airfields in the Marianas and the Bonins, supported by naval aircraft. He also expected to use the Mariana airfields as staging points: his aircraft would launch from their carriers, attack the U.S. fleet, land ashore to rearm and refuel, then attack again as American planes returned to their ships. Ozawa's force included nine carriers and six battleships. Moreover, about 540 land-based aircraft were positioned to support the fleet.

Ozawa's intentions were compromised on at least three counts. First, we could read coded Japanese messages. Second, our submarines had success finding and tracking the Japanese fleet, sinking two of Ozawa's oilers and four destroyers before he even left Tawi Tawi. Third, American airpower destroyed so many Japanese shore-based planes that by mid-June the enemy fleet was left pretty much on its own. Ozawa never understood this last factor; indeed, he was misled by deliberately false claims of successes by land-based aircraft.

American forces in Operation Forager included 128,000 troops—five Marine and Army divisions—and a fleet of no fewer than 26 aircraft carriers and 14 battleships. The Japanese were seriously outnumbered in every category of warship, and more importantly they trailed two-to-one in the number of carrier aircraft. Some 20,000 marines were ashore on Saipan by the end of D-Day, June 15. Their initial surge carried them across the landing beaches, but only half of the planned beachhead was secured. In conjunction with the tanks and artillery that had been landed, however, this was enough to ensure that the armor-led Japanese counterattack on that first night was repelled with the key support of naval gunfire from ships stationed just offshore. Supplies and more troops poured ashore during the following days. Spruance

ordered the reserve force, the Army's 27<sup>th</sup> Division, to land at once. The stiff Japanese resistance on Saipan and the approach of the enemy fleet led Spruance to postpone the assault against Guam from June 18 to 21.

At the outset, Spruance positioned the bulk of the fleet just west of the islands to maximize defense of the assault force. He intended to let his commanders fight the battle. His order to Vice Admiral Marc Mitscher, commander of carriers and battleships, and to Vice Admiral R.K. Turner, commander of the amphibious force, was simple: "Desire you proceed at your discretion selecting dispositions and movements best calculated to meet the enemy under the most advantageous conditions. I shall issue general directives when necessary and leave details to you."

In fact Spruance kept a firm hand on Mitscher's movements. He was very conservative by disposition and hesitant to let Mitscher move westward away from the amphibious area. Spruance was determined to protect the Saipan assault force and perhaps overly fearful that the enemy would make an end run around the fleet to attack amphibious and support forces off Saipan. He knew of the approach thanks to submarines which located the enemy departing Tawi Tawi anchorage in the Philippines on June 13 and made further reports on elements of Ozawa's forces on June 15–19, but on June 17–18 he rejected Mitscher's suggestion to move westward to meet the enemy. And neither Spruance nor Mitscher ordered an aggressive search policy to fix the Japanese position.

As a result, the Japanese made the first contact, spotting American carriers at about 1530 on June 18. But Ozawa did not want to attack late in the day when darkness would further challenge his inexperienced airmen. He launched an initial strike at first light on June 19, at a range of about 300 miles from the American flagship, the carrier *USS Lexington*, which was 90 miles northwest of Guam and 110 miles southwest of Saipan. Even when he was certain of the Japanese position, Mitscher was hindered in closing with the enemy because the wind was from the east, forcing his carriers to steam in that direction, away from the Japanese, to launch and recover planes. This was an interesting

change from the days of sail, when the windward position was the more desirable as it allowed a fleet to choose the moment of engaging as enemy. But with an aircraft carrier force, the windward position meant that Spruance had to yield the initiative to Ozawa. This did not mean that the Americans simply waited to be attacked: on June 17 the fleet commander coolly allowed a pre-planned air strike against Iwo Jima which claimed 63 Japanese planes. On June 19, he ordered a strike at Guam which destroyed another 35. These strikes put a fatal crimp in Ozawa's plans: lacking the support of their land-based brethren, Japanese carrier pilots were doomed to failure.

#### A Gamble Pays Off

The nine Japanese carriers launched four strikes at the 15 U.S. flattops which formed Task Force 58. The first was spotted when it was 160 miles away, at about 0900—when *USS Albacore* torpedoed the newest and largest enemy carrier, *Taiho*, which sank six hours later. *Shokaku*, one of the carriers that had launched the attack on Pearl Harbor, was sunk by another submarine, *USS Cavalla*. The first Japanese strike was intercepted by fighters from at least four U.S.

carriers and 45 of the 69 Japanese planes were shot down. The second strike cost the enemy 98 of 130 aircraft; the third got lost and returned to their carriers

without engaging American planes; and of the fourth, an 82-plane strike, only nine survived. This slaughter—Japan lost two carriers and 346 planes as compared to 30 American losses—was justifiably dubbed the “Great Marianas Turkey Shoot.”

Ozawa began withdrawing to the northwest after June 19, not because he thought he had lost the fight, but to reposition and recover the carrier aircraft he assumed had landed on Guam to refuel and rearm. Mitscher's patrols did not locate the Japanese carriers until 1540 on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Despite approaching darkness, he boldly decided to launch at long range, 300 miles. This gamble paid off, as American strikes found the Japanese force, sank two oilers and a carrier, and downed 65 of Ozawa's remaining 100 planes, with a loss of 17 U.S. aircraft. Because of the

long range and nightfall, American flyers had difficulty finding their carriers. In a dramatic event of the war, Mitscher had his ships turn on their lights—despite the danger of enemy submarines—to guide the pilots home. Although 82 planes ran out of fuel and ditched, almost all air crews were rescued.

Once he realized he could not catch the retreating Japanese, Spruance called off the pursuit and returned to a defensive position near the Marianas. Although bitterly criticized by Mitscher and others then and since for not more aggressively seeking out and attacking the Japanese, Spruance had accomplished not only his main goal of safeguarding forces attacking Saipan, but by winning the Battle of the Philippine Sea on June 19–20 he had defeated the Japanese in a major fleet action. The failure to sink more Japanese ships was relatively unimportant in light of the devastating destruction of Japanese planes and the irreplaceable loss of pilots: Ozawa finished the fight with only 35 of his original 430 carrier aircraft. Severe losses were also suffered by Japanese air forces based in the Marianas and the Bonins.

The overwhelming American superiority in the Marianas contributed to victory at relatively moderate cost, when the number of casualties is compared to those suffered in the European theater (especially on the Eastern Front). The fight on Saipan was one of slow advances by marines and Army troops supported by naval gunfire, Marine and Navy aviators flying from escort carriers, and Army Air Force flyers launching from the first rudimentary fields on Saipan itself. It was an exhausting battle against well dug in enemy forces resolved not to surrender—a facet of Japanese character underlined at the end of the campaign, when thousands of Japanese civilians committed suicide by throwing themselves and their children from cliffs at the northern end of the island.

Over 15,000 marines landed on Tinian on the 24<sup>th</sup>, moved rapidly, and cleared the island by August 1. Engineers began construction of airfields capable of handling B-29s even before the island was captured. Tinian, strategically the most important of the islands because it was suitable for large airfields, was also the easiest seized: casualties included 290 Marine dead against 6,050 Japanese—one of the more skillful victories of the war. Saipan was finally secured on July 21, the same day

the fight on Saipan was one of slow advances by marines and Army troops supported by naval gunfire

Guam was assaulted. In view of the toughness of the fight for Saipan, Spruance wanted to increase the number of divisions assaulting Guam. Hence, the Army's 77<sup>th</sup> Division was lifted from Hawaii to join the attack. The delay in landing to the July 21 gave the 77<sup>th</sup> time to arrive and allowed the assault force to conduct an extended prelanding bombardment by naval gunfire and by Army, Navy, and Marine aircraft.

The landings on Guam went smoothly—the island having been prepped by gunfire and air strikes since July 8—and Marine and Army troops made steady progress against well-entrenched Japanese resistance. Casualties were only half those of Saipan—7,081 Americans (1,435 dead) against 18,500 Japanese (most of whom died). Ground operations benefitted from an extensive, centrally controlled joint air support operation, as Army Air Force, Navy, and Marine planes flew close air support for the infantry.

A total of 5,000 Americans and over 50,000 Japanese died in the Marianas in the summer of 1944. These islands provided forward fleet, submarine, and logistics bases; the 20<sup>th</sup> Air Force launched B-29 raids against Japan from airfields built on Tinian and Guam; and Nimitz moved his headquarters to the latter island in early 1945. The entire American effort against Japan thereafter moved to a higher pitch. The Central Pacific campaign, highlighted by victory in the Marianas, was the mainspring of the victory over Japan.

An important political result of the capture of the Marianas was the fall of the government then ruling Japan. Under General Hideki Tojo, this government dominated the military that had led Japan into war, including the attack on Pearl Harbor and the accompanying assaults across the Pacific. On July 18, 1944 the Japanese supreme military headquarters took the almost unprecedented step of announcing a major defeat—the fall of Saipan—all the more unusual since the island was often described as a “home island” despite its 1,200-mile distance from Japan proper. Tojo apologized for the loss and resigned as prime minister. The defeat in and around the Marianas and Tojo’s resignation brought home to many senior Japanese civilian and military leaders the hopelessness of their position. Unfortunately, they were

more than matched by other officials determined to fight on.

The victory in the Central Pacific campaign was a major strategic step: it enabled massive bomber raids, which in conjunction with the submarine campaign would isolate Japan and destroy its industry and infrastructure. Although the Pacific was the scene of much hard fighting after the Marianas were secured, Japan had lost the war by the end of July 1944.

Was victory in the Marianas and the Philippine Sea really joint? It certainly involved all the services, but it was part of the Navy-dominated Central Pacific campaign. The Battle of the Philippine Sea was strictly a Navy affair, while Saipan was marked by Army-Marine disharmony of epic proportions, with the ground commander, Lieutenant General H.M. Smith, USMC, firing the 27<sup>th</sup> Division commander, Major General Ralph Smith, USA, because the latter’s troops were not moving as quickly as marines. This incident caused a debate that rages to this day. On Guam, however, the Army (77<sup>th</sup> Division) and the Marines (3<sup>rd</sup> Division and 1<sup>st</sup> Provisional Brigade) operated together remarkably well. Throughout the Marianas, Army, Navy, and Marine aircraft flew coordinated strikes in support of land forces.

The battles in the Central Pacific during June–July 1944 were not joint in terms of strategic formulation or command arrangements. The victory did demonstrate, however, the effectiveness of the services operating together and fighting tactically as a unified force. The Navy provided the strategic plan and bases from which land- and shore-based air forces secured success. The Pacific campaigns of 1944 were joint in a nascent sense—effective in warfighting and setting a pattern that has finally been realized today. Victory was the outcome of many efforts: logistic resources and acumen, inspired leadership in a joint environment, and above all the fighting ability—intelligence and bravery—of soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen who fought their way up Mount Topatchu, vanquished the enemy’s fleet in the Philippine Sea, and cleared the skies overhead.

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